This document is designed to provide graduate students in Political Science with a concise list of requirements for the program. Please direct any questions to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

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Graduate Program Personnel

Director of Graduate Studies: Emily Hencken Ritter
emily.h.ritter@vanderbilt.edu
Office: 338 Commons Center

Placement Director: Allison Anoll
Allison.P.Anoll@vanderbilt.edu
Office: Commons Center

Requirements for the PhD

Doctoral students must complete 72 credit hours. This includes a minimum of 42 hours of “quality” or didactic course work including the required courses:

- Two methods courses: PSCI 8355 (Research Design) and PSCI 8356 (Statistics for Political Research I)
- Three courses in field one (fields and requirements described below)
- Three courses in field two
- Two courses in field three
- Electives either in these fields or others to complete the remaining 42 hours

The remaining hours consist of thesis credit (PSCI 8999 for pre-candidates and PSCI 9999 for PhD candidates).

To maintain good standing in the program, doctoral students are expected to:

- maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.3 in the first semester of the program and 3.4 thereafter;
- finish any incomplete course by the end of the following semester;
- submit a completed Plan of Study and participate in the Second-Year Review by the end of their fourth semester in the program;
- complete the normal load of organized courses, which is a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester, until reaching the required total of 42 didactic hours;
- be an active participant in the research presentation series for their primary field;
- complete and pass the comprehensive exam in their first field by October 1 of year 3;
- complete and pass the second-year paper requirement by December 15 of year 3;
- complete the Qualifying Exam by September 1 of year 4;
- maintain satisfactory progress (receive an “S” grade) in 8999/9999 coursework; and
- perform at or above expectations in RA/TA responsibilities each semester.

Students who are out of compliance with these expectations or exhibiting severe delay in meeting them will be put on probation and receive a notice from the DGS thereof. Students who remain out of compliance after being put on probation may have their funding revoked by the graduate committee and can be asked to leave the program.

Coursework requirements

Doctoral students must complete 72 credit hours in total. This includes a minimum of 42 hours of “quality” or didactic course work including the required methods courses and field courses. The remaining hours consist of thesis credit (PSCI 8999 for pre-candidates and PSCI 9999 for PhD candidates).

Our programmatic objective is to require courses in such a way as to support the development of expertise
PhD students are required to complete the minimum courses and comprehensive exams in three fields:

- **Field One (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, or Political Theory):** Requires completion of at least 3 courses, one of which is normally expected to be the core course; and completion of a written and oral comprehensive exam. Each subfield may have additional requirements; students are advised to check with the field conveners for subfield-specific requirements.

- **Field Two (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, Political Methodology, or Political Theory):** Requires completion of at least 3 courses with a grade of B+ or better on average across the courses, one of which is normally expected to be the core course. In Political Methodology, students must complete 3 courses beyond the two required methods courses (PSCI 8355 and 8356). Each subfield may have additional requirements; students are advised to check with the field conveners for subfield-specific requirements.

- **Field Three:** Requires completion of 2 courses, with a grade of B or better in each, which normally includes:
  - Any two courses in a major field of political science (American Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, or Political Theory). OR
  - Two courses in Political Methodology beyond PSCI 8355 and 8356. These can be other methods courses within the Department, or approved courses outside the department (including the ICPSR Summer Training Program). OR
  - Two courses in a cognate field outside of political science. This option can be taken only with the prior permission of the Director of Graduate Studies and the student's advisor.

In addition to the field requirements, all students are required to complete the two core methodology courses: PSCI 8355 (Research Design) and PSCI 8356 (Statistics for Political Research I).

Students who receive a grade of B- or lower in any course must consult with the DGS and a faculty member in the student’s major field to discuss the student’s performance in the course and the program overall. The student may be asked to retake the course. Students receiving two or more grades of B or lower in PSCI courses in any semester OR a GPA lower than 3.3 in the first year or 3.4 thereafter in any semester may be placed on probation for unsatisfactory progress in the program.

Doctoral students typically take 8000-level courses. Students may take up to two upper-level undergraduate courses for credit toward the degree; any undergraduate courses must be approved in advance by the DGS.

Doctoral students seeking to transfer course credit from previous graduate study must consult with the DGS for approval. The student should email the DGS the name of the course they wish to transfer, what type of course or requirement they wish the course to count as, the syllabus for the course, and a transcript listing the grade received for the course. The DGS will consult with faculty who teach similar courses in the PSCI department to determine if the course is of similar intellectual level to a doctoral course and appropriate for the named requirement. In most cases, the DGS will not approve the transfer of more than one course or any course where the student received a grade lower than A.

Students who have completed their 42 didactic course hours should elect pre-candidate dissertation credits as PSCI 8999 or candidate dissertation credits as PSCI 9999, with the student’s major advisor serving as the course section instructor. Students should register for research credits up to 72 total hours. Candidates who have reached the required 72 credits should specify 0 credits of PSCI 9999, with the dissertation advisor as the course instructor. Note that international students maintain...
full student status even when registered for 0 credits of PSCI 9999, as long as they are enrolled as such.

Faculty assign grades of “S” (Satisfactory) or “U” (Unsatisfactory) to students enrolled in PSCI 8999 or 9999. Receipt of one grade of “U” in PSCI 8999 or PSCI 9999 will result in a student being placed on probation. Receipt of two successive grades of “U” would constitute two semesters out of compliance, which could result in a student being asked to leave the program.

**Academic Advisor**

Advising is a key element of doctoral training, as students learn by doing alongside their mentors. We strongly encourage multi-layered mentorship, such that a student will establish and maintain a network of cohort peers, advanced cohort peers, informal faculty members, formal committee members, and even mentors external to the department. In this way, the many facets of substantive expertise, methodological expertise, professionalization, and emotional support can be addressed with many linked hands.

Upon entering the program, the DGS will advise incoming students as to initial course selections and assign to each a faculty advisor. This assignment will be based on the DGS’s evaluation of appropriate student-faculty matches based on student interests and faculty advising responsibilities, but students who have an advisor in mind are encouraged to say so. The initial advisor assignment is preliminary in nature and in no way reflects an assumption the advisor will remain an advisor throughout the program. The advisor’s primary responsibilities are as a point person for the graduate student.

The DGS has responsibility for advising on course planning, program requirements, student progress, and all other administrative matters. The expectation is that students will ultimately select their own advisor by the third year of the program; the graduate school form officially selecting their advisor should be submitted to the graduate school by September 1 of the student’s third year.

**RA/TA Requirements**

Doctoral students are expected to work up to 19 hours per week each semester as a research assistant or teaching assistant for a faculty member or research center. This is to apprentice the student in the actual practices of research and teaching, as well as to develop relationships with a variety of faculty in the department. At the discretion of the faculty member(s), students will assist in research activities or teaching courses.

At the end of the semester, students will be evaluated by the faculty member(s). These evaluations are used to assess the student’s progress in the program; they may also be used in awarding departmental research funds for workshops, training, or travel as well as the departmental awards for best paper or the TA award. Students who receive two unsatisfactory evaluations from two separate professors can have their funding revoked and be asked to leave the program.

Each doctoral student is allowed two service-free semesters during their funding period, in which they do not work as an RA or TA for the semester but remain funded. Students, in consultation with their faculty advisors and the DGS, may select when to use these service-free semesters, provided that necessary teaching support is covered across the department.

**Reviews of Student Progress**
Annual subfield discussions.
Each year, the faculty of each subfield will meet in late April or early May to discuss the progress of each student for whom that field is their primary field. The DGS will attend each of these meetings in order to stay informed of all student progress and bring any relevant information from other subfields to the notice of primary mentors.

First-year review.
At the end of the first year, the Graduate Committee will review the progress of each student. Students will receive feedback regarding whether their performance has been satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A student who has made unsatisfactory progress in the first year will be placed on probation.

Second-year review.
Before the end of their fourth semester in the program, each student participates in a mandatory Second-Year Review. The purpose of the Second-Year Review is to assess the student's progress in the program and discuss the student’s next steps in the program.

Prior to the Second-Year Review, students are required to submit a Plan of Study form identifying a) their three fields; b) a list of completed and future courses taken to meet the requirements of the degree; c) when they plan to take the comprehensive examinations (if not complete or not passed); (d) their second-year paper advisor; (e) their plan and topic for their second-year paper; (f) their primary advisor; and (g) the general topic of the dissertation. The form is listed on the Resources for Current Students website on the Department’s webpage.

Students must consult with two faculty members in the first field of study in preparation for the Second-Year Review. In the Second-Year Review, the faculty members, the student, and the DGS will discuss the student’s progress and Plan of Study. Although rare, students making unsatisfactory progress may be asked to leave the program at this point.

Responsible Conduct in Research (RCR) Requirement

Research integrity is fundamental to good research. Vanderbilt University has an obligation to model, teach, and actively promote the responsible conduct of research in scholarship and science. The University requires all graduate students to complete online RCR training and participate in a discussion-based session to further explore the issues and challenges in conducting ethical research and scholarship.

To be in compliance with this requirement, all students must complete online CITI training for the social and behavioral sciences during their first semester of study. They must also participate in the A&S discussion session on RCR at the end of their second year; the full-day training is always scheduled for the Monday following graduation in May. These requirements must be fulfilled before a student may enter PhD candidacy.

Information on the RCR requirements can be found on the graduate school website: https://www.vanderbilt.edu/researchintegrity/rcr.php and on the BRET full-day trainings: https://medschool.vanderbilt.edu/bret/responsible-conduct-research/

Please note: RCR training is NOT THE SAME as HSR/IRB compliance [also completed in CITI].
Comprehensive Exams

Comprehensive exams allow students to demonstrate the breadth of their knowledge of their primary subfield and to develop original arguments about the state of scholarship in the field, preparing them to read for research puzzles and develop graduate seminars in the future. Students take one comprehensive exam for their first field at the end of the second year (May). In rare cases, students can petition the DGS to take comprehensive exams at a different time.

Students should consult with faculty in the subfield for subfield-specific guidance on the content covered by comprehensive exams. Such consultation should occur in the spring of the second year (if not before). Students may not sit for comprehensive examinations if they have incompletes on their academic records.

A student who fails a comprehensive exam must petition the Graduate Committee to retake it in fall of the third year. Normally, students can expect a second chance to pass a comprehensive exam. However, students who are out of compliance with Department expectations (weak academic performance, incompletes, or poor performance in RA/TA work) may be denied that opportunity, and therefore denied further funding and/or asked to leave the program. This decision will be made by the Graduate Committee in consultation with faculty in the student’s first field.

Students may sit for a comprehensive examination no more than twice. A second failure of a comprehensive exam in the first field automatically revokes the student’s funding and the student will be asked to leave the program. Failure to pass the comprehensive exam by January 15th of the third year implies the student may be denied funding and/or asked to leave the program. The decision will be made by the Graduate Committee in consultation with faculty in the student’s first field. The student may be eligible to receive a Terminal MA (see requirements listed below).

Second-year Paper

A key part of academic training is the development of original research for publication. As such, students will write a second-year paper of original political science research that would be sufficient quality for a major conference in political science.

Students will complete and present a solo-authored, article-length research paper by August of their third year in the program.

Papers may draw from papers originally written for courses. However, it is generally the case that course papers will need substantial revision before becoming suitable second-year papers. Students may write papers in fields other than their first or second fields.

Acceptable article length for most political science journals is 8,000 to 11,000 words, and second-year papers should be a similar length. The article should take a structure similar to those common to the relevant subfield and should be of sufficient quality to be submitted for a major conference in political science. In consultation with their advisor, students with demonstrated research ability may petition to the Graduate Committee to submit an NSF-style grant proposal in lieu of a research article for this requirement.

Students must identify an adviser for the second-year paper. Second-year paper advisers may be the first-year adviser but are not required to be. Second-year paper advisers may go on to supervise dissertations but are not required to do so. Advisers must agree (certified in writing, to the graduate program coordinator) to serve this purpose by the time and day grades must be submitted to the University in the
The fall of the student’s second year. Penalties for failing to identify an adviser by this due date are at the discretion of the DGS. Students are advised to contact the DGS or their field chair if they are having difficulty identifying an adviser.

A complete draft of the paper must be submitted to the DGS for circulation to the department by a date set by the DGS, at least 7 days prior to the presentation date. Students will present the paper for all available political science faculty and graduate students at a session with all second-year students just before the beginning of the regular semester in August of their third year. The student’s second-year paper advisor will solicit and summarize the comments of the faculty who attend the presentation to provide as feedback to the reading committee and the student as to the presentation.

Students may then revise the paper in response to comments and must submit the final manuscript to the DGS and their respective readers by August 31st of their third year. The final paper is submitted for reading by the advisor and one additional faculty member chosen by the DGS and the Graduate Committee. The readers may use a DGS-provided rubric or amend it for their preferences, but those expectations should be shared with the student before they submit their first drafts. Final grades will be submitted to the student and DGS no later than within one month after submission.

The paper can receive a pass, a low pass, or a failing grade. The DGS may mediate grade discrepancies. If the paper does not receive a unanimous pass, the student may revise and resubmit it once more by no later than the end of the fall semester of their third year. Failure to pass the second-year paper by January 15th of the third year implies the student may be denied funding and/or asked to leave the program. The decision will be made by the Graduate Committee in consultation with faculty in the student’s first field. The student may be eligible to receive a Terminal MA (see requirements listed below).

Qualifying Examination
(i.e., Prospectus Defense)

To advance to candidacy, students must pass an oral Qualifying Exam, where they defend the prospectus. Before a Qualifying Exam may be scheduled, a student must have completed all 42 required didactic course hours, cleared any remaining “incomplete” grades, and passed the required comprehensive exam and second-year paper requirements. Ideally, students will defend the dissertation proposal by the end of the third year. Students who have not successfully defended the prospectus and advanced to candidacy by Sept. 1 of the 4th year in the program will be placed on probation. A student is allowed only two opportunities to pass the Qualifying Exam. Students who have not successfully defended the prospectus and advanced to candidacy by May 15th of the 4th year in the program will be denied further funding and/or asked to leave the program. Students with exceptional circumstances may petition the graduate committee and the graduate school for a one-year exception to this rule.

The student must have four faculty on the Qualifying Examination (QE) committee. The composition of the committee should be made in consultation with the student’s major advisor, who will serve as chair of the dissertation committee, and the DGS. Three members of the QE committee must be members of the Vanderbilt University Department of Political Science. One member of the QE committee must be an “outside member,” who is a member of the Graduate Faculty at Vanderbilt or a faculty member at another institution.

1 Graduate Faculty at Vanderbilt include faculty members who are tenure-track or tenured in departments or programs offering the MA or PhD outside of the Department of Political Science.

2 All others (including individuals who are research-track, clinical, or professional, or who are outside the
The Request to Schedule the Qualifying Examination Committee form must be filed with the Graduate School no later than two weeks before the student's Ph.D. Qualifying Examination is to be held. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

After passing the Qualifying Examination, the student must submit the Qualifying Examination Results form to the DGS. All members of the QE committee must sign this form. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website. Per the Graduate School’s rules, a student is allowed only two opportunities to pass the Qualifying Examination.

Shortly thereafter, the student must submit the Request to Appoint the Dissertation Committee form. The Dissertation Committee need not be the same as the Qualifying Examination Committee, but the same rules that govern the composition of the QE committee also apply to the Dissertation committee. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

**Admission to PhD Candidacy**

A graduate student may become a candidate for the PhD degree (also known as “All But Dissertation” or “ABD” status), upon recommendation of the DGS and the departmental faculty, by applying to the Vanderbilt Graduate school. Application for admission to candidacy requires the following:

1. Completion of 42 hours of didactic coursework, including required courses, with no outstanding incomplete grades;
2. Completion of the Graduate School’s RCR requirement;
3. Passing the required comprehensive examination;
4. Passing the second-year paper requirement;
5. Approval of the dissertation prospectus and qualifying examination by the student’s approved committee; and
6. Good standing in the PhD program.

All students are required to be in candidacy by May 15 of their fourth year of study. Students not entering candidacy by this date may forfeit their funding and continuation in the program per consideration of the graduate committee and the Graduate School.

**Dissertation Requirements**

A candidate for the PhD degree must present a dissertation demonstrating technical competence in the field and research of an independent character. The dissertation must be completed within four years after a student has been admitted to candidacy for the degree. Upon petition to the political science graduate committee and the Graduate School, a one-year extension of candidacy may be granted. If such a period has expired without successful completion of the dissertation, the student may be dismissed from the Graduate School.

Candidates must file an Intent to Graduate form with the Graduate School at least four months before they intend to graduate. Each graduation date has specific deadlines for filing and defending the dissertation. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

Candidates must file a Request to Schedule Dissertation Defense form with the Graduate School at least two weeks before the date of the defense. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website (university) must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School, via the Request to Schedule the Qualifying Examination Committee. Deviations in committee constitution must be approved by the DGS and the Graduate School.
Locator website. The candidate should also submit a copy of the completed dissertation to the PhD committee at least two weeks prior to the dissertation defense. The committee reviews the dissertation and conducts the final examination. Instructions for submitting final copies of the approved dissertation can be found on the Graduate School website.

**Requirements for the MA Degree**

Ph.D. students can earn a "Masters in Passing" after passing the comprehensive exams, completing all course requirements, and successfully defending a dissertation prospectus. Students are encouraged to apply for this degree, when they have met the requirements. Students can file an Intent to Graduate form with the Graduate School at least four months before they intend to receive the Masters in Passing. Each specific graduation date has its own deadline for filing. The required form is available at the Graduate School’s Form Locator website.

For a handful of students who entered as doctoral students but, of their own volition or as a result of departmental action, will leave the program prior to completing the requirements for PhD candidacy, the Terminal Master’s (MA) can be awarded after 33 hours of course work (including PSCI 8355 and 8356), if the student maintains a 3.0 average in 8000-level courses (which must comprise at least 27 of the 33 hours).

The department admits a limited number of students to a "four plus one" program designed to allow Vanderbilt undergraduate students to complete the BA and MA degrees in four years of undergraduate study plus one year of graduate study. 4+1 MA candidates must complete 30 hours of 8000-level course work and submit a thesis or pass a field examination. The thesis is directed and approved by a two-person committee comprised of the student's adviser and one other faculty member. Among the 30 credit hours, students must have completed the two-course sequence in methods (PSCI 8355 and 8356) and at least 6 hours in one field.

**A Recommended Course of Study**

The following table describes a recommended course of study to complete the program in 5 years of funding. Deviations are applicable by student in consultation with their advisor(s) and the DGS. Deadlines are requirements of the program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Year 1</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Year 3</th>
<th>Year 4</th>
<th>Year 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic plan</strong></td>
<td>Coursework in substantive fields, methods (7 courses)</td>
<td>Coursework in substantive fields, methods (7 courses)</td>
<td>Complete quality course requirements if not already finished.</td>
<td>Take 12 hours or research credit (9999) – dissertation coursework.</td>
<td>Job market. Finish dissertation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop original/second-year papers.</td>
<td>Take 9 hours of research credit (8999) – prospectus coursework each semester.</td>
<td>Defend prospectus. Edit papers. All</td>
<td>Complete 2-3 chapters or 2 articles of dissertation. Submit &amp; revise papers for publication. Apply for grants to support dissertation research</td>
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requirements for degree except dissertation must be complete prior to prospectus defense. or additional year of study.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Deadlines</th>
<th>First-year review by May 15</th>
<th>Second-year review with proposed plan-of-study by May 15.</th>
<th>Comprehensive exam in first field in May.</th>
<th>Second-year paper submitted and presented in August.</th>
<th>Prospectus defense must be completed by September 1 of 4th year.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Following Summer</td>
<td>Summer training, deepen topic knowledge</td>
<td>Second-year paper and prospectus research.</td>
<td>Advance dissertation &amp; publications</td>
<td>Write another chapter. Prep job talk and materials.</td>
<td>Move to your new job!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Policy for Parental Accommodations

The Vanderbilt Graduate School policy guarantees PhD students a minimum level of accommodation during the transition to parenthood, specifically, for students with substantial parenting responsibility as a result of childbirth, care of newborn(s), or a newly adopted child. A graduate student primary caregiver designated as having substantial parental responsibility may be relieved of full-time graduate duties and responsibilities for up to six weeks after the birth or adoption of a child.

If both parents are Vanderbilt graduate students, only one may take parental leave. The parental leave provided by this policy may be taken during the semester in which the child is born or adopted, or during any subsequent semester that begins no later than six months after the birth or adoption.

Students benefitting from accommodation are relieved of full-time academic and program responsibilities such as teaching and research assistant duties and coursework during the six-week period. Coursework assignments and examinations will be rescheduled to avoid conflicts with the accommodation period and to provide reasonable time thereafter to complete academic requirements. If the timing of the accommodation period proves too disruptive to satisfactory progress in coursework, the student may drop the course and retake it another semester.

As soon as possible upon return, the student must provide her or his departmental chair with (a) a copy of a birth certificate or, (b) in the case of adoption, written certification of child adoption from the adoption agency.
Departmental policy: The Department will exercise flexibility in making accommodations in such a way that is not in conflict with Graduate School policies and requirements. Beyond the official six-week accommodation period, the student may request up to a one-semester delay in post-coursework requirements, including the second-year paper, comprehensive examinations, the prospectus defense, and, with a petition subject to the approval of the Graduate School, the deadline for entrance into candidacy at the beginning of the fourth year. The student should consult with the DGS in planning such arrangements.

It is important to note that parental accommodation is not a leave of absence. Students benefitting from accommodation are expected to maintain registration, remain in communication with their advisor and/or the DGS, and perform limited academic work as possible (e.g., reading) outside of the six-week leave period, assuming the good health of the student and the child(ren). They may be asked to do research assistant duties outside of the six-week leave period.

Students seeking accommodation should inform the DGS in writing at least three (3) months before accommodation is anticipated, unless unforeseen circumstances arise or religious reasons preclude doing so. The written request must indicate the expected birth or adoption date. The DGS will submit the student’s request for accommodation to the Graduate School and work with the student to exercise flexibility.

Graduate Student Awards

Erwin Hargrove Outstanding TA Award
The department will present an annual teaching award to a graduate student based on their annual performance. Students self-nominate at the end of each academic year. Nomination materials should include a cover letter, student evaluations, syllabi for courses taught, and a curriculum vita. Faculty observation letters and/or a statement of teaching philosophy are welcomed but not required. A student may win this award only once in his or her career. The winner of the teaching award will be chosen by the director of graduate studies and the placement director each summer. Depending on departmental resources, the award may include a small monetary prize.

Graduate Research Award
In early summer, the director of graduate studies will compose a committee which will give an award for the best graduate student research paper of the year. Papers presented at scholarly conferences, completed for coursework, or accepted for publication over the past academic year, including the summer before the previous academic year, are eligible. A paper may not win this award twice, that is, it cannot win in one year as a conference paper and in the following year as an article publication, though it will be up to the committee to determine whether or not a submission is sufficiently similar to a previous award-winning paper to be disqualified from consideration. Only papers written by doctoral students are eligible. Students will be invited to self-nominate. A student may only have one paper per year under consideration for this award, and this includes co-authored papers. A paper is eligible only if all co-authors are current Vanderbilt students. Specifically, a paper co-authored with a faculty member or a non-Vanderbilt graduate student is not eligible. Depending on departmental resources, the award may also come with a small monetary prize.
Graduate Studies Committee

The requirements stipulated in this handbook are considered minimum standards. The Graduate Studies Committee of the Department is empowered to add requirements when an individual student's course of study or quality of performance indicates that additional work is advisable. The Graduate Studies Committee shall also be empowered to waive specific requirements when, because of departmental resources or individual student needs, such waivers are advisable. Actions taken by the Graduate Studies Committee are subject to review by the full departmental faculty.